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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0721
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 4738
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 7583
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 4260

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 006571

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DEPT FOR NEA/ARPI (SHUKAN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/19/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: SAUDI COUNCIL OF MINISTERS WARNS TERRORISM HAS NO
RELIGION OR NATIONALITY

Classified By: Ambassador James C. Oberwetter
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A headline on the front page of the August 15 edition of the English language Arab News read, "Kingdom Warns Against Linking Islam With Fascism," referring directly to President Bush's August 11 statement on the foiled terrorist plot in the U.K. President Bush's comment, that the U.S. is still at war with "Islamic fascists," has sparked heated public reaction in Saudi Arabia, igniting blistering commentary in the Saudi media, on-line chat rooms and web sites, and conversations with Saudi interlocutors. The Arab News article reported that the King's cabinet (Council of Ministers) rejected the phrase, denouncing any link between terrorism and religion or nationality. End Summary.

¶2. (C) President Bush's comments ignited a firestorm of editorials, many of which question the sincerity of the President's earlier statement that Islam is a religion of peace. One Saudi writer wrote that "it is inappropriate to ascribe the vicious actions of evil-minded people to their religions." He drew comparisons to Hitler, Mussolini, and the IRA, stating that in following this logic, one must label Hitler a Christian Nazi, Mussolini a Christian fascist, and the IRA Christian terrorists.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador recently attended a dinner hosted by Hassan Yassin, a close friend and advisor to Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal. The Ambassador asked Yassin for his thoughts on the President's use of the phrase "Islamic fascists." Yassin, with a sour look on his face, responded that "we know what year this is," referring to the upcoming U.S. elections. This reaction typifies Saudi elite's understanding of U.S. foreign and domestic policies, but is uncharacteristic of the larger Saudi public, who associate the President's comment with the perception that the U.S. unconditionally supports Israel in its aggression against Lebanon and Palestine.

¶4. (C) Comment: One of Saudi Arabia's greatest red lines is the desecration of Islam, as witnessed through the reaction to the Danish caricatures of the Prophet Muhammed. The public's discontent with regional events and increasing displeasure with the SAG's close ties to the U.S. have led to greater public criticism of the SAG, and inevitably forces it to exercise extra caution in its relationship with the U.S. End Comment.
OBERWETTER